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ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

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19 January 1951

REPORT ON EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE SPLIT
WITHIN THE BALLI KOMBETAR PARTY.
(August/November, 1950.)

To understand the present schism within the Balli Kombetar Party, it is necessary to have a clear picture of the background of the party and the struggle for power within the BK Executive Committee which has been going on ever since its foundation in 1939, at the time of the Italian occupation of the country.

The Balli Kombetar, meaning "National Union," was formed as a resistance movement of conservative elements in Southern Albania, to offset the then growing influence of the Communist-led "National Liberation Front." Its membership was chiefly recruited from the landowners and their peasant following and those youths of the towns who had not joined the NLF. It also included a small group of intellectuals who, although Republican and reformist, were strongly nationalistic and refused to swallow the Communist line.

At its inception and for several years thereafter, the leadership of the Balli Kombetar was largely in the hands of its conservative founders, Midhat Frasheri, Ali Klissura, Nureddin Vlora, and Kocha Muka, who regarded the party as a war-time alliance of diverse anti-Communist elements rather than a political party replete with ideology and program. However, the intellectual reformist minority headed by Abas Ermeny, Zef Pali, Halil Machi, Vassil Andoni, etc., had other ides. From the start they were determined to see the BK welded into a modern political organization on Western lines with a strong socialist tinge. Their argument was that the time had come for Albania to advance beyond its traditional tribal and factional brand of politics. Thus, there existed from the beginning a conflict of ideas and interests between the conservative landowners and their followers and the socialist intellectuals.

The Communist victory in 1944 sent many of the BK leaders into exile. When the party was reconstituted among the refugees in Italy and Greece, there was a significant change in the leadership. The Conservatives no longer dominated the organization, in fact they barely managed to share control on an equal basis with the Socialist intellectuals. The party might well have split at that point, had it not been for Midhat Frasheri, whose prestige as the sole "Elder Statesman" of Albania was too great for the Socialists to flout, even though they considered he represented the "Old Guard." Also, the

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Socialists realized that if the Allies decided to support any Albanian refugee movement, they would naturally turn to Frasheri, the only Albanian of any real political stature.

From 1945 to 1949, it was Frasheri who held the Balli Kombetar together. But all through this period the influence of the Socialist group grew stronger within the party leadership. This was particularly true with the advent of the formation of the National Committee for Free Albania. The Socialist group was able to produce the only military leader within the BK, Abas Ermenye. They also produced the best qualified administrators and propagandists. Eventually, when funds were made available to the BK through the Committee for Free Albania, the Socialists produced the only qualified Albanian journalists who established and today publish the BK party newspaper.

The death of Frasheri in New York in October, 1949, gave the Socialists their opportunity to take over the BK. They did so with a political efficiency which showed they had probably learned a few tricks from the extreme left. Frasheri's seat on the BK Executive Committee was taken over by a Socialist and when the re-shuffling was over the Socialists dominated the BK by a margin of six seats to four. To replace Frasheri as President of the BK, they settled on Hasan Dosti, a political nonentity who was as weak as he was vacillating. He was quite willing to accept orders in return for his election to both presidency of the BK and the Committee for Free Albania.

Their next step was to draw up a political program for the BK and turn it into a left-wing Agrarian movement. This move was capped by the entry of the BK into the International Peasant Union. When the smoke blew away, the Conservatives led by Ali Klissura, Vlora, Muka and others found that the Socialists had not only euhred them out of any voice in the BK but the Committee for Free Albania as well.

The result was a series of bitter quarrels between the Conservatives and the Socialist leaders, which ended with a meeting called by Ali Klissura in Naples at which he denounced the Socialist group for their high-handed tactics and called on the membership of the Balli Kombetar to follow the Conservative banner under his leadership and that of other founders of the movement, such as Vlora, Muka, Peshkopia and Begeya. The Socialists quickly responded by expelling Klissura and other Conservative leaders from the Party. Since both were members of the BK's Executive Committee, this left two seats open. These were filled immediately by Socialists, bringing their majority to eight seats to two. This split within the Balli Kombetar divided the estimated membership-in-exile -- roughly 400 enrolled Ballists -- about sixty-forty in favor of the Socialists.

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During August and September insults and recriminations, accusations and counteraccusations flew back and forth between the two groups. The Socialist-Ballists, who are as adept as any at the fine Albanian art of character assassination, worked hard and well discrediting the opposition. They claimed that a mere handful of Ballists had gone over to the Conservatives--a statement which they later had to withdraw when confronted with the names of those supporting Klissura. They spread the report that Klissura was acting as a tool of the Italian Service which was allegedly paying him large subsidies. (It is not at all impossible that the Italians, in view of their long-standing animosity toward the NCFA, seized the opportunity to make a little trouble and passed some funds to Klissura's group. But I have seen no evidence of the \$5,000 monthly subsidy which the Socialists claim is being paid to Klissura.)

In September, I was asked by Washington to see Dosti and discuss the situation with a view to finding an acceptable solution, since it was felt that the dissension among Albania emigres was not to the best interests of the Committee for Free Albania.

Dosti took an "on-the-fence" position though he went on to explain that it would be very difficult to effect any reconciliation. He explained that deep-seated personal animosities existed between the leaders of the two groups, quite apart from the basic ideological differences between "the landlords" and the "left-of-center reformists". Dosti went on to assure me that he, of course, was a man "strictly of the center". I explained to him that (for a change) he must accept the responsibilities that went with being President of the Committee for Free Albania, take an above-party position, display some leadership, and find a way of resolving the quarrel. He promised to do so--but neither then nor at any subsequent time has he done so.

Shortly after this meeting, Halim Begeya, secretary-general of the dissident group arrived in the United States. I had a long talk with him and he impressed me as being a fairly honest individual telling a fairly straight story. The gist of it was that the Conservatives wanted to play a role within the Committee for Free Albania. With the death of Frasheri they had been frozen out of any voice in the BK and, thereby, in the NCFA. They were perfectly willing to reconcile their differences with the Socialists if they participated in the affairs of the BK on an equitable basis. If not, they wished to be permitted to have a representative of their group on the Executive Committee of the Committee for Free Albania. Klissura, he said, was willing to step aside in favor of any of his followers, if there were objections to him.

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I explained to Begeya that we favored a reconciliation and told him I would arrange a meeting with Dosti for that purpose. After a similar briefing from me, Dosti met with Begeya. The results were nil. Dosti equivocated, vacillated, and finally made it clear that any decision in the matter would have to be made by Ermenye and the others.

Early in October it was decided that Dosti should go to Rome for the purpose of holding further discussions with the BK Executive Committee on this subject. Dosti was to be accompanied by Noci Kotta so that a full-dress meeting of the NCFA Executive Committee could be held for the first time in many months. It then would be in a position to deal immediately with any aspect of the BK situation which affected the Committee as a whole.

On October 12th I left for Frankfurt, met [] and discussed with him various ways and means of dealing with the BK and the dissident group. We agreed that the split was not in the best interests of the NCFA; therefore, it should not be ignored or allowed to deteriorate further. We also agreed that in our forthcoming meeting with the British in Paris we would support the view that either the BK would have to take steps to reach a compromise solution with the dissidents or else the dissidents should be considered for membership on the Executive Committee of the NCFA. (In the latter case, however, Klissura himself would not be acceptable as the dissidents' representative on the NCFA.)

On October 20th [] and I met with the British in Paris. Present were Bruman-White, Perkins, and Hiberdine, all of whom appeared much more concerned with the effect of NCFA activities on Anglo-Italian service relations, than the problem of the split in the BK. Their attitude re the latter was: (a) the dissidents were a small and unimportant faction who should not be taken seriously; (b) in any case, past services of the Ermenye group in providing operational personnel and assistance required that we now stand by them in their quarrel with the dissidents; (c) any move to take the dissidents into the NCFA would cause the immediate resignation of the Ermenye group from the Committee.

After several meetings, we and the British drew up a paper which set forth a mutually agreeable course of action; namely, that the Ermenye group would be prevailed upon to make a determined effort to reconcile differences with the dissidents and thus solve the problem within the BK. If this failed, other steps would be considered.

In Rome shortly thereafter, we handed to Dosti a "note verbal" which stated that it was the joint Anglo-American view that there were only two courses of action open to the BK: (1) either agree to the inclusion of a dissident representative on the NCFA Executive Committee or; (2) reach a compromise with them within the BK.

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The BK chose the latter alternative and presented to us a written statement to the effect that they would take immediate steps to bring about the desired reconciliation. However, further discussion of the methods they were willing to employ showed clearly that the BK was merely paying lip-service to the idea of a reconciliation. Dosti stated that the only steps they were willing to take were: (a) offer Nureddin Vlora and Kocha Muka seats on the BK Executive Committee; (b) offer three seats on the BK Sub-Committee for International Peasant Union Affairs to three other dissidents. Beyond that they would not go.

At several subsequent meetings, all efforts to get the BK to agree to some form of compromise that would be acceptable to the dissidents met with stubborn opposition. For example, the BK refused to issue any appeal to the dissidents to close ranks; refused to meet with Klissura or any of his representatives; refused to discuss ways and means of granting the dissidents a greater voice in the BK if they returned to the fold.

After a week of futile argument, [] and I were convinced that the BK had no intention of making any concession which might possibly lead to reconciliation. In fact, while discussing the problem with us, they were at the same time carrying on an intensive and bitter propaganda campaign against the dissidents which could only serve to widen the breach. Meanwhile, our efforts to apply pressure on the BK were being thwarted by the activities of the British Representative in Rome, John Hiberdine. From the beginning, Hiberdine had taken what we considered to be a negative position with regard to the proposed reconciliation. He supported the view that the dissidents were of no importance; that the British--and therefore, the Americans--were morally obligated to support the Ermenye group because of past commitments. From reliable outside sources, we learned that Hiberdine was privately advising Ermenye and Co. not to yield to our demand that a reconciliation be reached.

Finally, on November --[] and I decided that further conversations on the subject were pointless. Since the BK was not willing to compromise, the only alternative was to reconsider the decision taken in Paris with the British.

Before leaving Rome, I had conversations with Said Kryeziu and Abas Kupi regarding the BK situation. Both felt the dissidents were entitled to representation on the NCFA. They also feared that if Ermenye won this battle to exclude a sizeable group of Albanian exiles from the Committee's activities, he would be in a stronger position than ever to dominate the entire movement. Both men felt that Ermenye's threat to withdraw from the Committee if the dissidents were given representation in the NCFA was pure bluff.

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Kryeziu and Kupi were anxious to put the the Executive Committee, which would mean the of the dissidents since between them they he. However, I informed both men that for the time we did this step to be taken. I said they would be advised at a later time of our wishes in the matter.

From Rome I flew to London where I met [] on November 23. We met with the British representatives who meanwhile seemed to have undergone a change in their attitude toward the entire problem. They accepted without argument my explanation of the BK's attitude and quickly agreed that the only alternative was to consider bringing the dissidents into the NCFA Executive Committee. In fact, after a second meeting with the British it was my impression that this course would be followed in the immediate future.

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